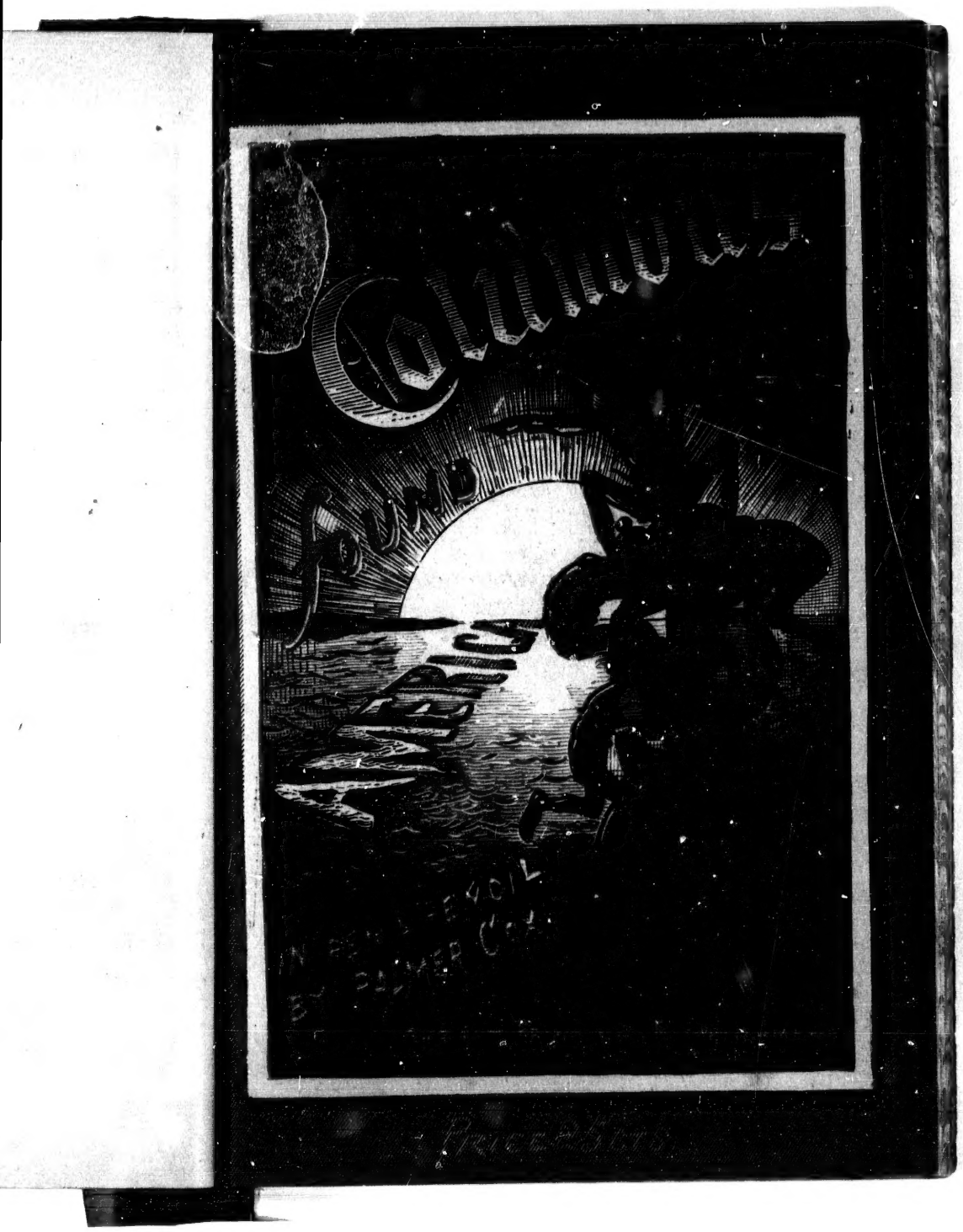
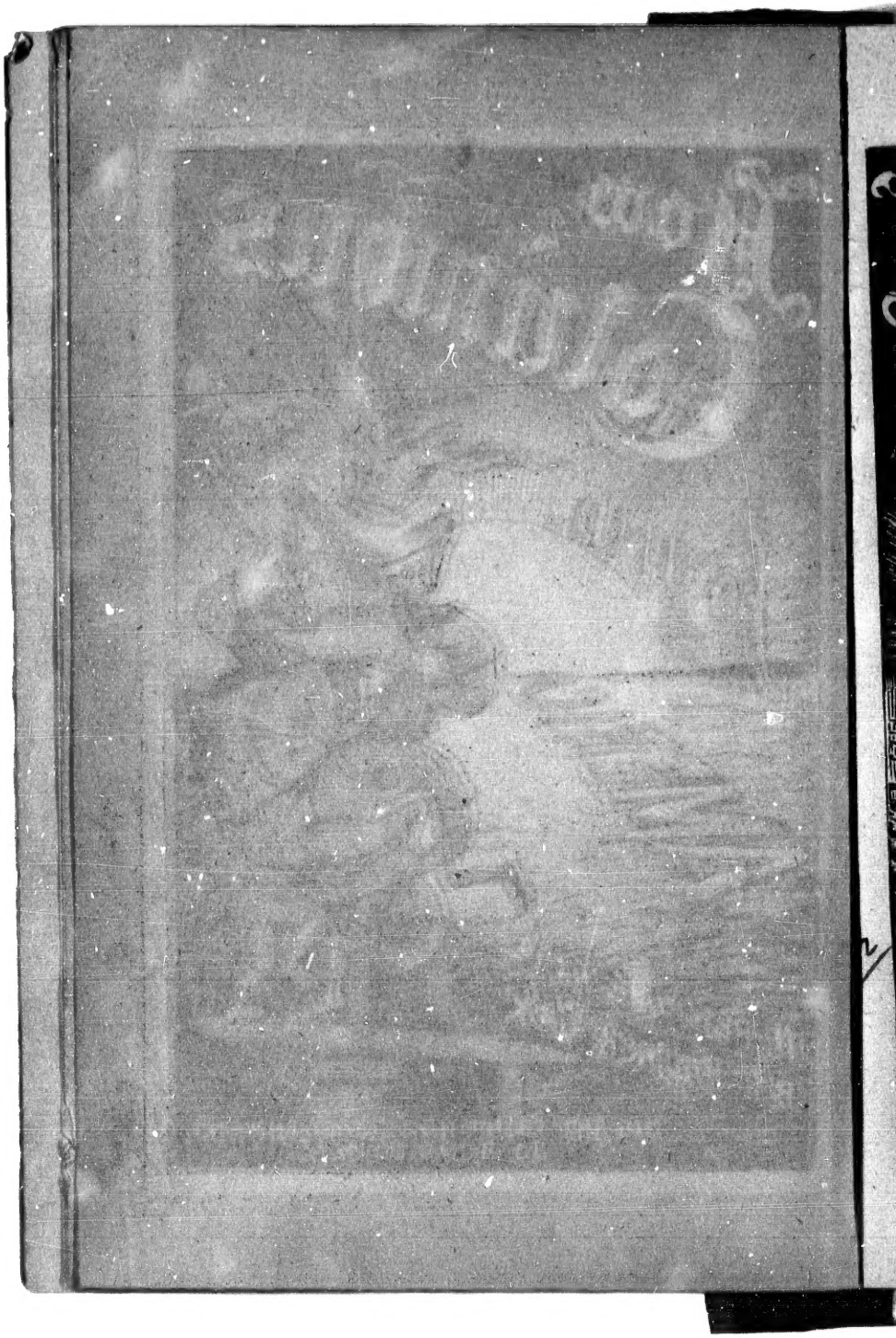

Columbus
Found
America
IN PEN & PENCIL
BY PALMER COX



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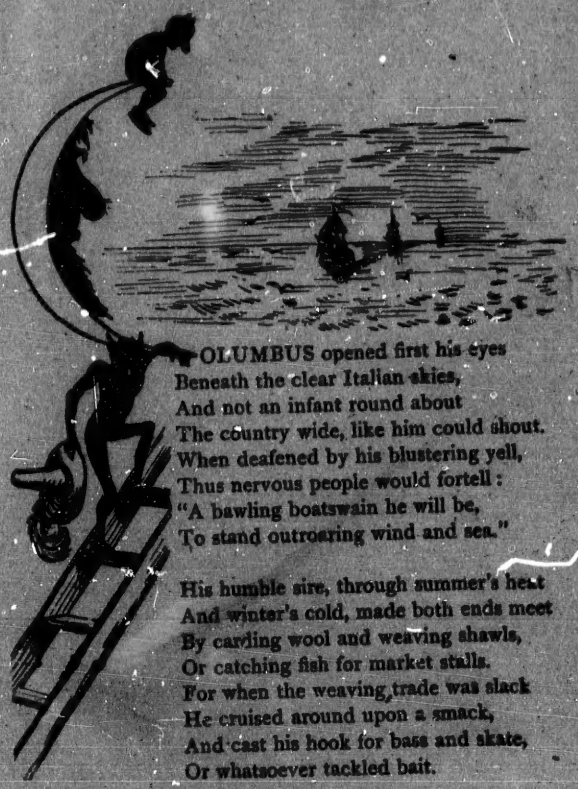

COLUMBUS opened first his eyes
Beneath the clear Italian skies,
And not an infant round about
The country wide, like him could shout.
When deafened by his blustering yell,
Thus nervous people would fortell:
"A bawling boatswain he will be,
To stand outroaring wind and sea."

His humble sire, through summer's heat
And winter's cold, made both ends meet
By carding wool and weaving shawls,
Or catching fish for market stalls.
For when the weaving trade was slack
He cruised around upon a smack,
And cast his hook for bass and skate,
Or whatsoever tackled bait.

And ancient, vague traditions say,
Columbus, on his natal day,

When laid upon the balance plate,
Weighed ten pounds, less a pennyweight

And while a tiny babe in arms,
For him the roaring deep had charms.
He loved to see the shipping tall,
And sailors through the rigging crawl;

He even laughed and crowed in glee,
Before a painted ship and sea.

And when within the house of prayer,
The babe was brought, a name to bear,

He proved his courage in that hour,
And took the great baptismal shower
In open mouth, in eyes and nose,
And clapp'd his hands, and worked his toes,
And only seemed inclined to shout
When the supply on hand gave out.

Then knowing savants looked amazed,

And wond'ring on the infant gazed;

And when they reached the open air,
Express'd opinions freely there;
And said :—"Who lives to see the time
That infant reaches manhood's prime,
They'll see a sailor place his name
Upon the deathless scroll of fame."

And when there was no more demand
For nursing tube or swathing band,
And young Columbus wander'd free—

The wash-tub was his mimic sea,
By which for hours he'd lingering sail
Upon the suds his vessel frail,

And often like a sailor brave,
Withstood the terrors of the wave.

As up through boyhood's days he pass'd,
His native tact developed fast;

With futile care his mother tried
Her jar of jam to safely hide;
In vain the hens would steal away,
Their eggs in hidden nests to lay,

The young discoverer would sail
Directly there, and never fail.

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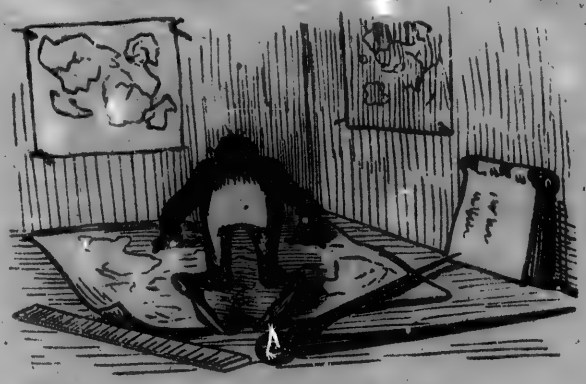
In Lisbon next the youth appears
Precocious far beyond his years,



And with a thirst naught could appease,
To solve the problem of the seas.

With maps and charts around him strew'd
He passed his hours in solitude,

Still tracing out where ships might steer,
If souls were not possessed of fear.

For days his visage would he hide
In Aristotle's pages wide.

Nor less o'er Strabo bend and pore,
Until his taper was no more.

To him astronomy revealed
The mysteries of the starry field,

Until, though blindfold, he could say
Where west by south, or sou' west lay.

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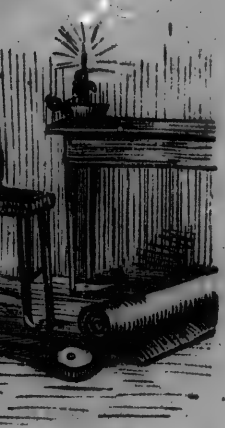

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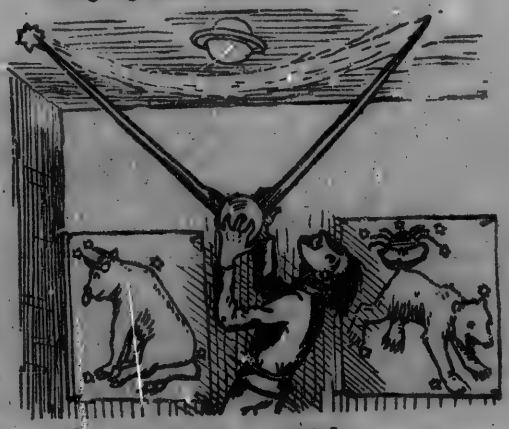
Still was he found with compass stout,

His parallels dividing out.

The planets fixing one by one,
Designing moon and blazing sun;



The ceiling, tables, wall and floor,
The trace of his dividers wore.

From pole to pole with mighty sweep,
That made the loosen'd slivers leap,
Upon the barn door and the fence,
He struck the world's circumference,

Unmindful of the laughter loud
That issued from the thoughtless crowd,
Who gathered round to jeer and joke,
Or criticise his master stroke.

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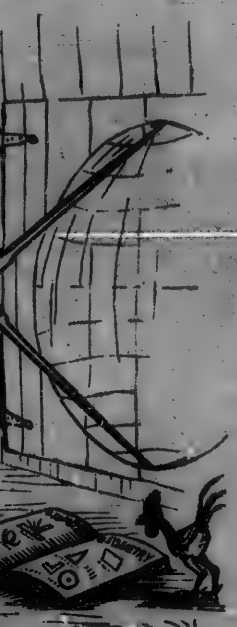

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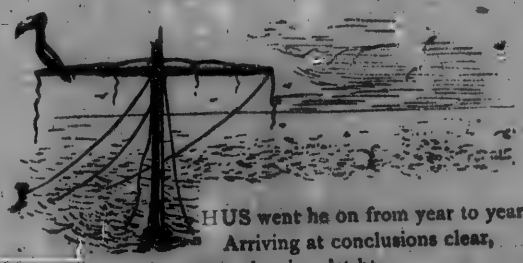
CANTO II



THUS went he on from year to year
Arriving at conclusions clear,
Removing every clogging doubt
And wiping old impressions out,
Until he was prepared and fix'd,
To prove geography was mix'd;

Then started forth at once to bring
His project fair before the King.

For this alone was all required,
To crown the scheme as he desired,
The King's approval, and his purse,
And blessing of the Church, of course,
For who can hope to weather gales,
With curses clinging to his sails.

But slight these obstacles appear'd
As for the Palace gate he steer'd,
To lay his plans and urge his pleas,
Before the Royal Portuguese.

The Sovereign answered to his call,

And led the way to spacious hall,
Where, soon, before his wondering eyes,
Columbus spread a map of size;

And with his compass pointed out
To undiscovered lands the route.
And said: "Now place at my command
A vessel staunch with sailors manned,
And ere a twelve-month you shall reign
The monarch of a vast Domain."

The King was shock'd, yet pleased withal,
For Portugal was rather small,
And hardly gave him room to swing
His scepter, as became a King.

But when the summon'd Council view'd
The maps and charts, they all poch-pooh'd;
They urged the King to curb his pride,
And thus to crush Columbus tried;
"If, as you argue, earth is round,
Which much we doubt is logic sound,
When sailing forth adown the seas
Your ship will navigate with ease;
But, when you try another tack
And wish to steer the vessel back,
How can you think the sails will fill
Enough to drive your ship up hill?"

Columbus felt his "dander" rise.
"And *you*, forsooth! are reckon'd wise?

You marvel at wide maps and charts,
And *I* at narrow minds and hearts.

You grope in ignorance profound!
And this is what does me astound:

Why the Creator should display
His handiwork on such dull clay!"

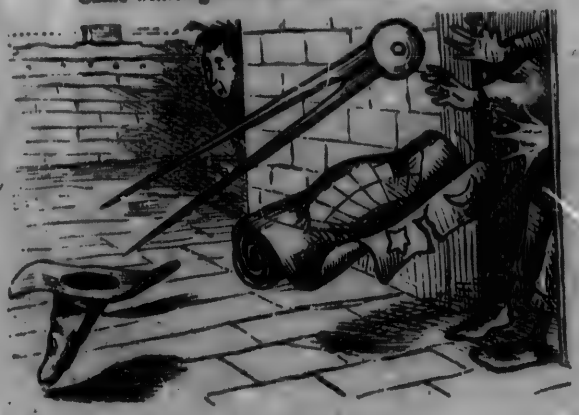
At this the Council was enraged,
And war upon Columbus waged.

To seize him was their first desire,
To boost him out they next aspire.

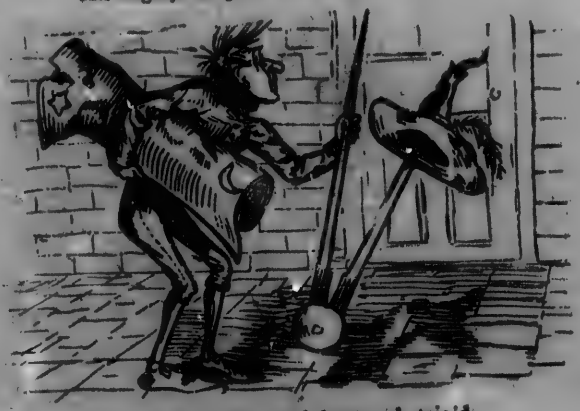
The King himself, though old and lame
A hand took also in the game.

Columbus fought, but, ne'ertheless,
They crowned their efforts with success.

His highly valued drawings, next
Came whirling from the Council vex'd.



Then, like a streak of lightning sent
From heaven to earth with fell intent,
With points extended bright and bare,
His mighty compass cleft the air.



Though badly damaged, bent and stain'd
With joy each treasure he regain'd.

Disgusted with the doting King,
And narrow-minded Council Ring,

Columbus hastened to the pier
To hail a passing Gondolier;

And soon his bark skimm'd o'er the main,
Its bowsprit pointing straight for Spain.

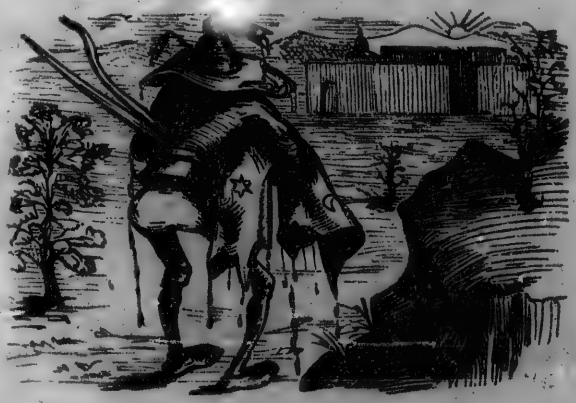
But when the Spanish coast was nigh,
A storm arose, the sea ran high,

Columbus left the mizzen rail
And sprang aloft to shorten sail;
But ere his flying jib was furl'd,
The ship against a rock was hurl'd.

Far over shiver'd stem and mast
Columbus safe on land was cast.

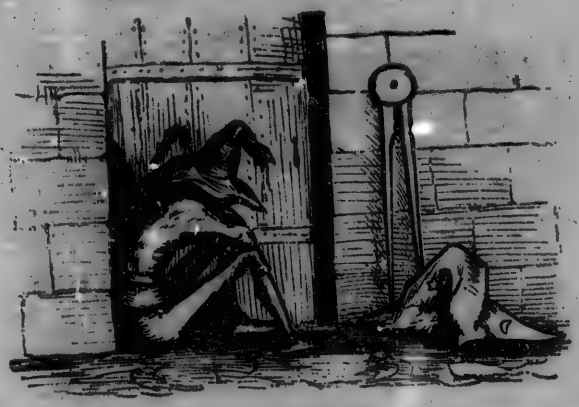
The stranded vessel split in staves,
While full chin-deep in swashing waves

Columbus dashed with mad desire,
And rescued his effects entire.
Then bruised and battered, wet and stiff,
He slowly climbed a rugged cliff,



And in a weak distressful state
Approached a neighboring convent gate.

But while he raised his hand to knock
The Abbot's key whirled in the lock,

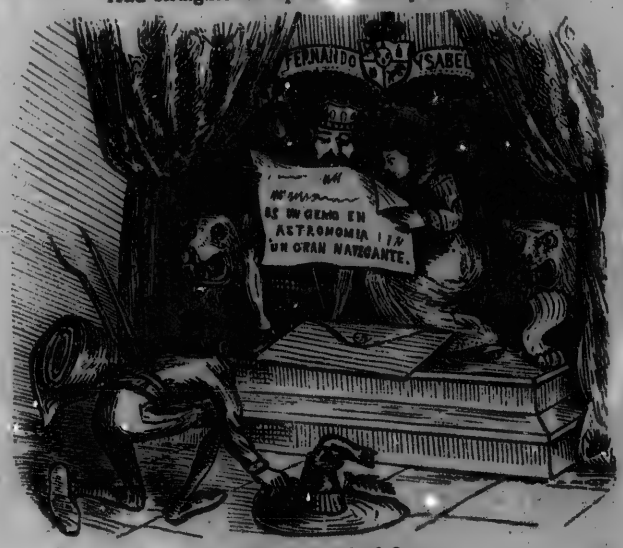


And not until the morning chime
Did it revolve a second time,
When lo! the Reverend Abbot saw
A sight that fill'd his soul with awe.

Across a damaged parchment roll,
Unconscious lay the wretched soul.

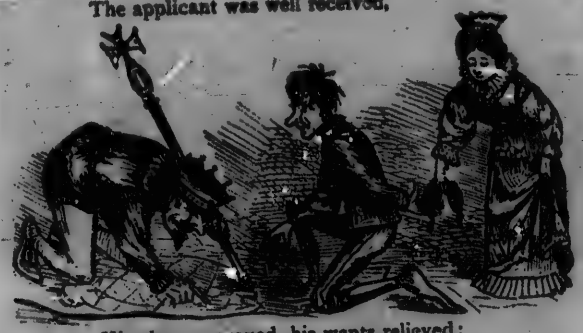
But ere an introductive note
The influential Abbot wrote

Colúmbus with the choicest wine
Had straightened up his ...nber spine;

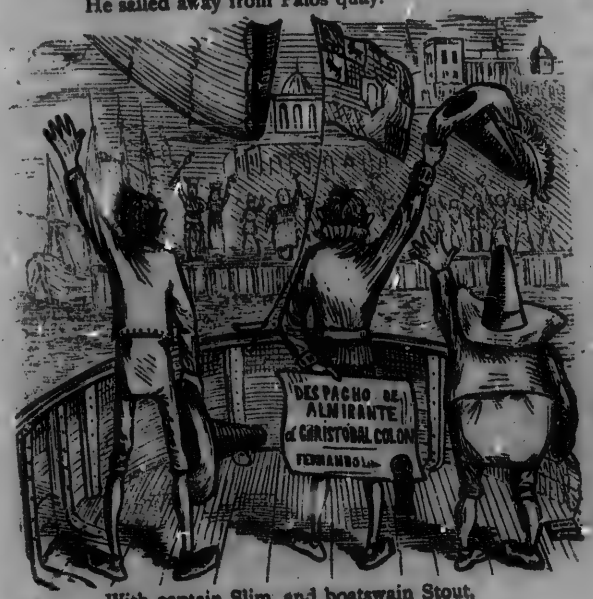


Ere drowsy fowl to roost had flown,
He knelt before the Spanish throne.

The applicant was well received,

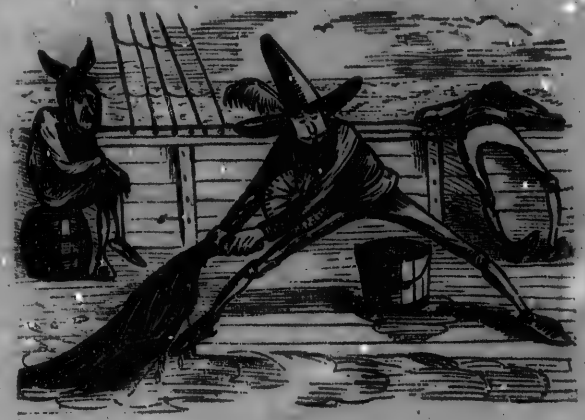


His plans approved, his wants relieved;
And soon to search the trackless sea,
He sailed away from Palos quay.

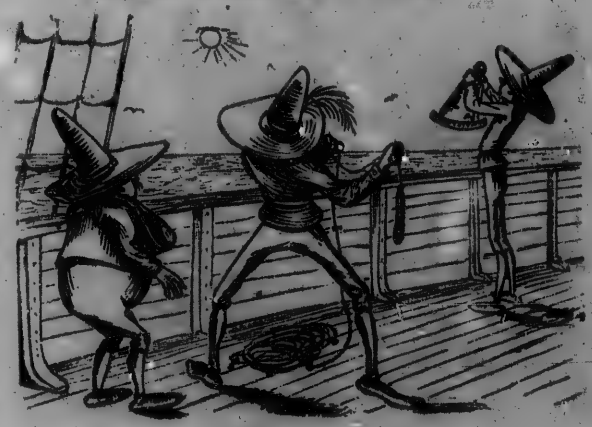


With captain Slim, and boatswain Stout,
To help him work his problem out.

Throughout the voyage o'er the deep,
When men were sick or needed sleep,



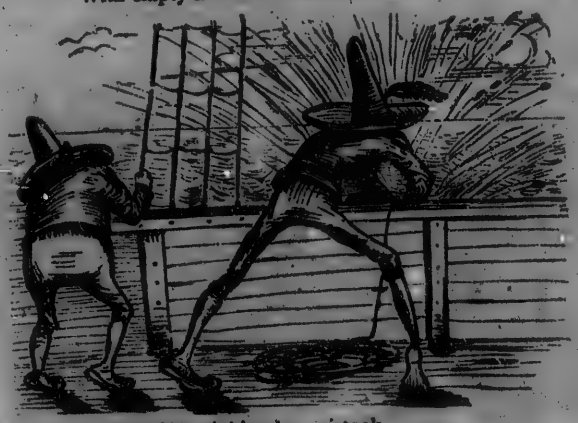
Columbus oftentimes would stoop
To scrub the deck from bow to poop,



Or, watchful by the bulwarks stand,
And heave the lead with tireless hand.

One day, while thus with greasy lead,
He sought to test the ocean's bed,

A hungry shark that followed nigh,
With empty maw and watchful eye,



The swiftly sinking bar mistook
For sausage flung by wasteful cook,
He snapped the weight, as down it bore,
Then opened wide his mouth for more.

As one may readily divine,
The fearful tug upon the line
Surprised Columbus, who was bent
Across the rail on work intent;
And, having neither hook nor bait,
Expected not a haul so great.

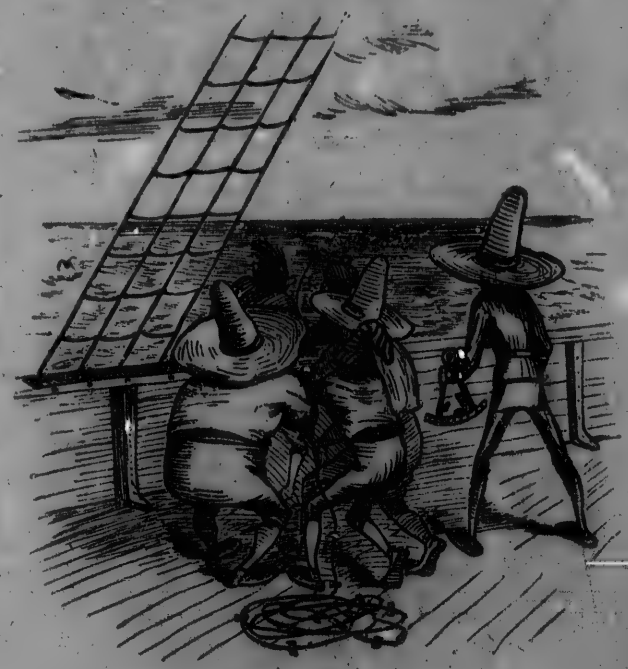
Small choice remained, one thing of two,
To drop the line, or else pursue!
To do the former was to lose
The only lead they had to use;
The latter, and more daring plan,
Was more in keeping with the man.

So overboard into the sea,
Still clinging to the line, went he;

Some forward ran and some ran aft,
Some wrung their hands, while others laugh'd.
Indeed it was a comic sight
To see him cling with all his might,

Through scattered spray and dashing wave,
Determined still his lead to save.

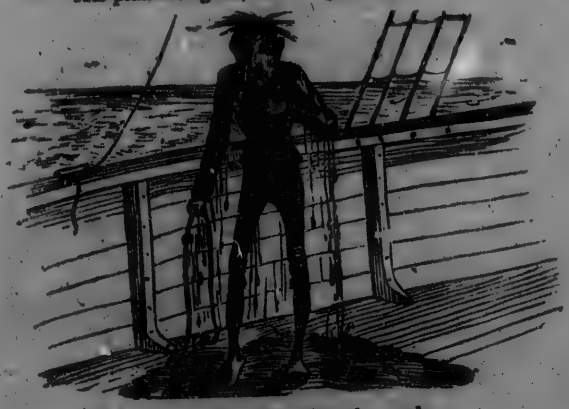
And it had fared this mighty land,
So peopled now, so rich and grand,
For still upon the Jersey Heights,
Would gleam the red men's signal lights,
And on Manhattan Isle to-day
The wolvereen would gnaw its prey,
Had not the shark's incisors keen,
Dissevered the cord that stretched between.



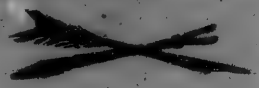
Then sailors waking from their trance,
The deep sea line secured at once,
All bending to their work together,
As when they reefed in stormy weather,

And singing, "Cheerily yo heave ho!"
Hauled back Columbus from below.

More dead than 'live the rail he cross'd,
His plummet gone, his compass lost.



When breath returned a bow he made,
And thanked the crew for timely aid.



HEN weeks and months had taken flight.
And still no land appeared in sight,
The faithless sailors deemed it vain
To further sail across the main;
And, as Columbus still adhered
To his design and onward steered,

Their secret thoughts expression found
And hints of death were whispered round.

Once, while Columbus stood apart
To scan his hydrographic chart,

The mutineers with stealthy stride,
And sinful thoughts approached his side,

Before he knew their vile intent
Within a canvas sack he went.

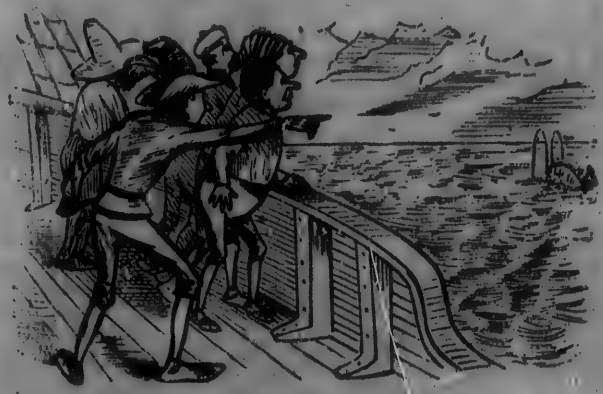
In vain Columbus kicked and cried,
The bag was strong, its mouth was tied;

On shoulders broad he soon was laid,
Then to the vessel's side conveyed.
But just as they essayed to throw
Their victim to the fish below,

A rusty jack-knife proved a friend—
He ripped the sack from end to end

Then, turning on the guilty crowd,
His flashing eyes the boldest cow'd.

And shrinking backward from his face,
Each ruffian sought the hindmost place
When pointing o'er the larboard rail
Towards a large disporting whale.



Columbus cried in scornful vein:
"Behold that vessel bound for Spain!

Before the wind with hatches tight
She's scudding fast in ballast light;
If thus she bears and springs no leak,
She'll ground her keel within a week.

Now all you bloody grumbling men,
Who long to see your wives again,

A keg of water and a sack
Of biscuit take, and board her back;
For, while this ship can ride the seas,
I'll point her prow where'er I please.

And should aught happen to the craft,
I'll westward steer upon a raft,
Until I satisfied shall stand
Upon that gemm'd and golden strand."

Although the sailors longed to steer
Directly back for Palos pier,
That hardly was the sort of ship
On which they wished to make the trip.

So from the captain to the cook,
Columbus swore them on the Book,
That henceforth let what would ensue,
They'd faithful prove the voyage through.

Next day a bird while soaring nigh,
Straight through the shrouds essayed to fly.

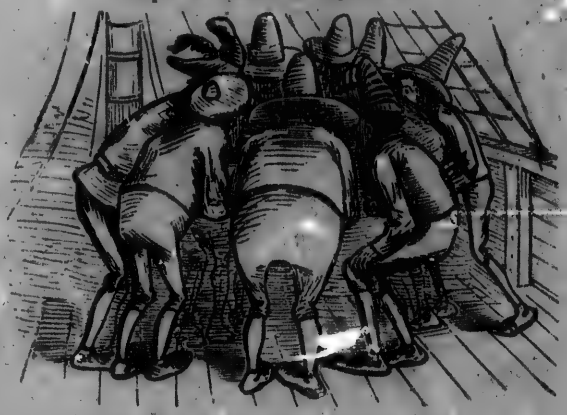
With mighty wings and lengthy beak,
And dangling legs and frightened shriek,
It toiled awhile as in a net,
More baffled with each rope it met,
Until, for want of elbow room,
He fell upon the spanker boom,
And ere its wilderment had pass'd
A dozen hands secured it fast.

Then with their prize, so strangely caught,
The eager crew Columbus sought,

Who, free from all depressing doubt,
For land still kept a sharp look out;
Believing, if his views were sound,
The golden coast would soon be found.

When he surveyed the seabird's tail,
A smile illumed his visage pale.

And by that smile the sailors guessed,
New hope had kindled in his breast.



When all the crew approached his side,
He asked them if they aught espied
About the captive in his hand,
That proved they now were nearing land.

The captain first held fast the prize,
And o'er its features pass'd his eyes.

And next the portly boatswain viewed
Each part with great solicitude.

His greatest boast through life had been
About his eyesight quick and keen;
But, like the captain, soon he swore,
The bird no land mark round it bore.

And then the brawny boatswain's mate,
In turn surveyed the seabird great.

And thus from hand to hand it passed,
Until it reached the cook at last;

Who seeing officers and crew
All fail to find the slightest clew,
Now thought the lucky moment came
To win distinction and a name;

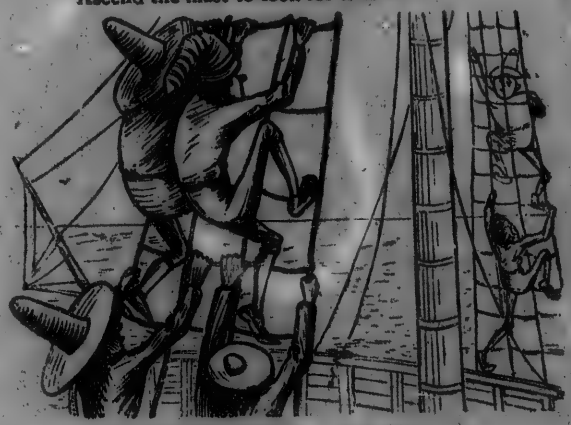
But quickly he resigned the care
Of such a strong and cross affair.

"What blockheads all!" Columbus cried,
"How ill prepared for ocean wide,
But fit to guide with poles or pikes,
A sailless scow through narrow dikes.
Behold this tail, for well you may,
The underside is worn away,
No perfect feather can be found—
This comes of trailing on the ground.

I'll wager all my hopes of fame,
Against an organ-grinder's name,
That now, within one hundred miles,
The land we seek to Heaven smiles!"

With every word Columbus spoke
New hope within each bosom woke.

Towards the ropes at once they fly,
As though a hurricane was nigh,
And nimbly climbing hand o'er hand,
Ascend the mast to look for land.



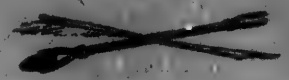
The cook and captain side and side,
Like messmates up the ratlins stride.

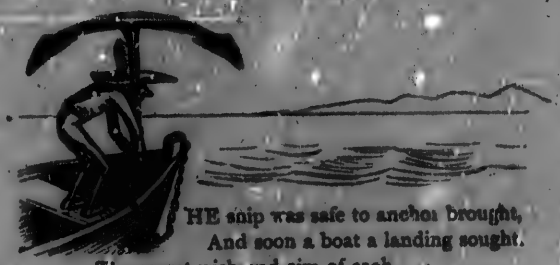
Columbus, not to be behind,
Soon gave the seabird to the wind.

And springing for the highest shrouds
Appeared to climb into the clouds,
He overtook the panting crew,
All straining for the point of view;

The men, who reached the yard before
He quit the deck, he clambered o'er.

And, first of all, the gallant tar,
Espied the tract of land afar.





THE ship was safe to anchor brought,
And soon a boat a landing sought.
The secret wish and aim of each,
Was to be first upon the beach.

So, ere the keel disturbed the sand,
The eager sailors leaped for land.
But, ah! their leader oft had lain
Awake o'nights, with heated brain,

And mused upon the fame in store
For him who first would reach that shore.

So, from the gunwale of the boat,
Columbus, like a mountain goat,
Eclipsed the foremost with a bound,
And first set foot upon the ground.

Then in his sovereign's name, unfurled
The flag of Spain, and claimed the world.

The sailors, who, some furlongs back,
Had rudely thrust him in the sack

Now weeping round his ankles thronged,
And begged the grace of him they wronged.

And, like a christian, he erased
Each blot from record, and embraced.
Then off they moved a busy crew,
Collecting wonders wild and new,
To carry back across the main,
And lay before the court of Spain.

Columbus offered a doubloon
To him who'd catch the first baboon.

But, when a monkey chase began,
Himself the fleetest men outran;
The first to reach its haunch was he
And snatch it from a cocoa tree.

Many a bag with gold was filled,
And many a dangerous object killed.

For every forward step they made,
Before them some new marvel laid.

While they were rambling fields about,
Columbus suddenly cried out,
And pointed through a strip of wood
To where a rude log cabin stood:—

"By all the saints, alive or dead,
I swear a Dutchman is ahead!*
Thus was I ever doomed to sorrow,
Since first I bade the world good-morrow.
Revenge be mine! the hut surround
And capture every knave that's found!
Who lets a rogue escape my power,
Shall feed the wolves within an hour!"

*A German named Tyrker, was one of a party that reached America prior to the discovery by Columbus, (see "Select Letters of Columbus," by R. H. Major.)

But while towards the hut they drew,
The frightened owner came in view.

Columbus cried: "it cannot be
A Dutchman from the Zuyder Zee,
Has studied navigation too,
Or read the books that I've gone through;
Unwearied bent o'er map and chart,
And Aristotle learned by heart.

Then how in thunder came you here
Upon this western Hemisphere?"

With fear awhile his tongue was tied.
At length all trembling, he replied:
"Last year id vas, to catch somedings
For mine goot frau, my net I flings.

Ven vip! a vind comes down on me,
Und sweeps mine poat from Shermany.
So help me cracious! vot I shpeak
Vas gospil vords: in shust von veek
Und dree days more, I shveare to you,
I schoomps upon dose country new!
So here I shtops und makes mine peer,
To sell to some red beebles here."

A while, dumbfounded and amazed,
Columbus on the stranger gazed,

And then remarked: "At break of day
We start upon our homeward way,
By virtue of your silvered hair,
And wife at home, your life I spare.

But by the holy shepherd's crook,
With me you'll sail as second cook.

And if you dare to blow around,
That *you* this rich Dominion found,

Or hung your rag above the plain
Before I raised the flag of Spain,
I'll lash you naked to the mast,
A special mark for sun and blast;

And poison sharks from day to day,
With cutlets from you sliced away!"

With bag and baggage soon they start
For home and friends with lightsome heart,

The Dutchman with a load oppress'd
In active service with the rest.
Before a strong and favoring gale,
The vessel plunged with straining sail;

While days seemed weeks, and hours days,
Until on native land they'd gaze.

But safe and sound, the sturdy ship
Soon measured back her lengthy trip;

And people from all quarters ran
To welcome home the daring man.
The priest and beggar on that day
Disputed o'er the right of way.

And peer and peasant did contend
Who first should hand to him extend.

Surrounded by his valiant crew
With gems and wonders, not a few,
Columbus stood towards the pier
And answered back the Royal cheer.

Then with a smile of pride surveyed
The shouting masses there arrayed,
And felt the most exulting thrill,
That can the human bosom fill.

When every sailor reached the land,
And all the treasures were in hand,

A long procession marched in state
Towards the marble palace gate.
Columbus and the sovereign pair,
Moved foremost through the crowded square.

And next the crew tramped through the town,
With sacks and bundles loaded down.

Then rich and poor from far and near,
By thousands followed in the rear.

While here and there a monk serene
Lent tone and sanction to the scene.
But when the sailors did outpour,
The wonders of that distant shore,

The queen, unused to strange alarms,
Fell swooning in the monarch's arms.

Nor was the queen alarmed alone—
The monks sought refuge on the throne;

In abject fear they kicked and prayed,
And shook their gowns, and called for aid.
But when Columbus next unrolled
The blazing gems and lumps of gold,

In admiration soon was drown'd
All fear of objects crawling round.

The King an entertainment gave,
In honor of Columbus brave;
He summoned to the palace hall
His talented musicians all.

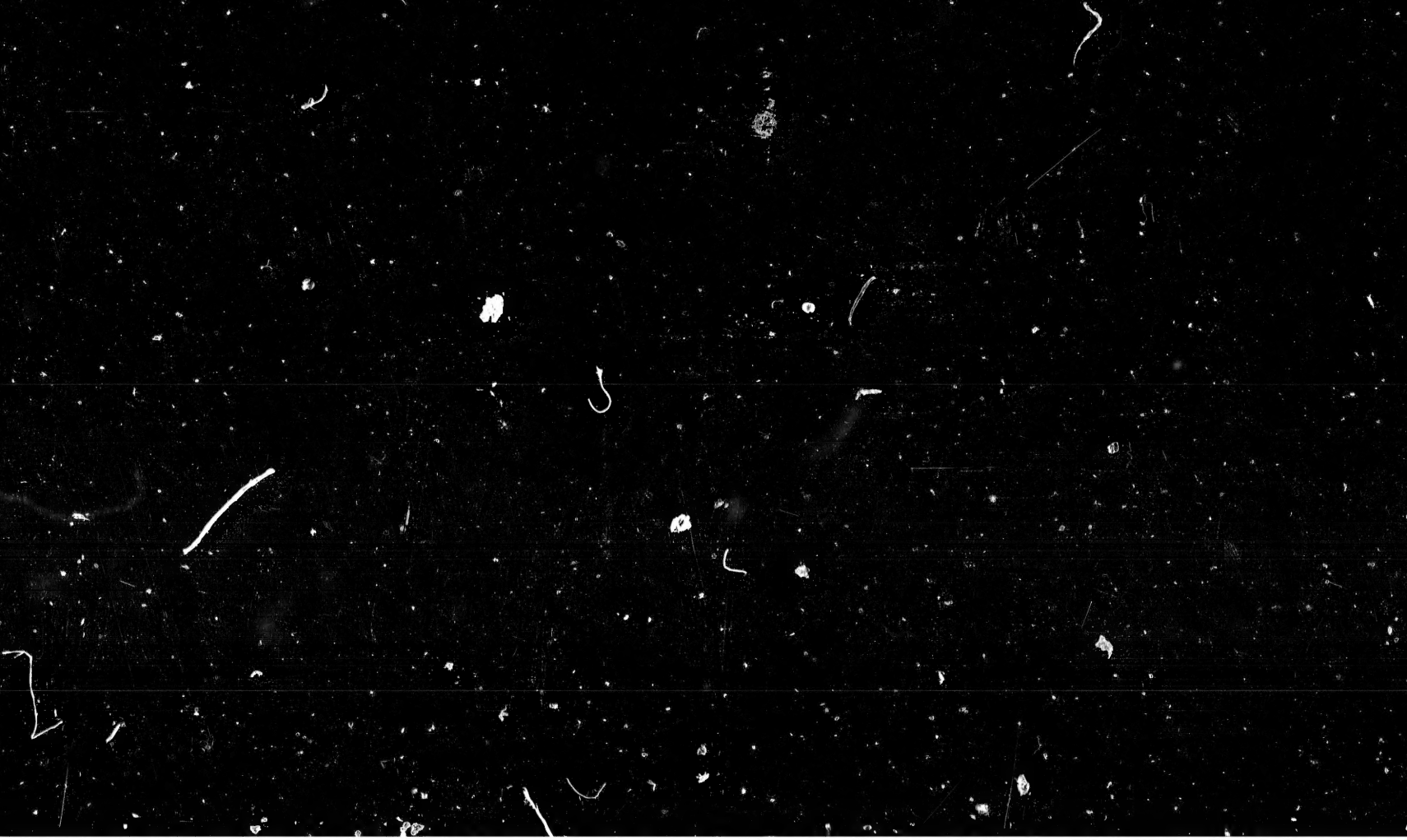
To them assigned a platform high,
And bade them do their best or die.
Then full five hundred couples there
Did wildly toss their limbs in air,
To music of a loftier strain
Than ever had been heard in Spain.

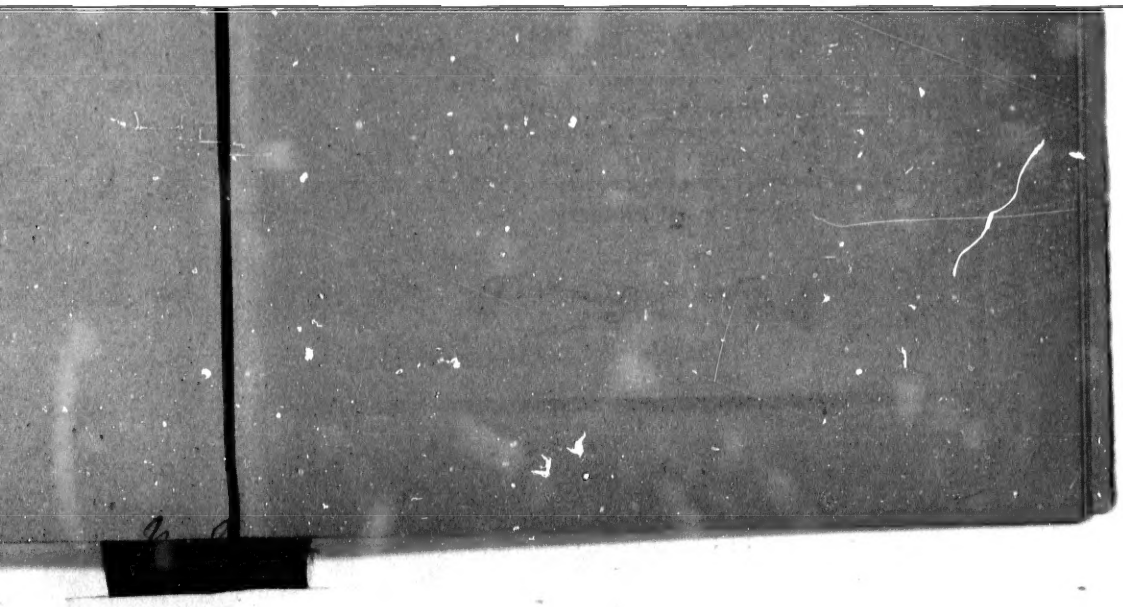
The part to good Columbus fell
To lead the sport with Isabel.

And nobly did the hero prance,
The Sovereign through the lively dance.
While every member of the crew,
The freedom of the palace knew,

And not a sailor, high or low,
But with some countess shook his toe.

Columbus sat installed, between
The grateful King, and gracious Queen,
With barons, dukes, and ladies fine,
To drink his health in royal wine.
And many a reverend monk and priest,
To ask a blessing on the feast.
In such a circle leave we may
Columbus on his happiest day.





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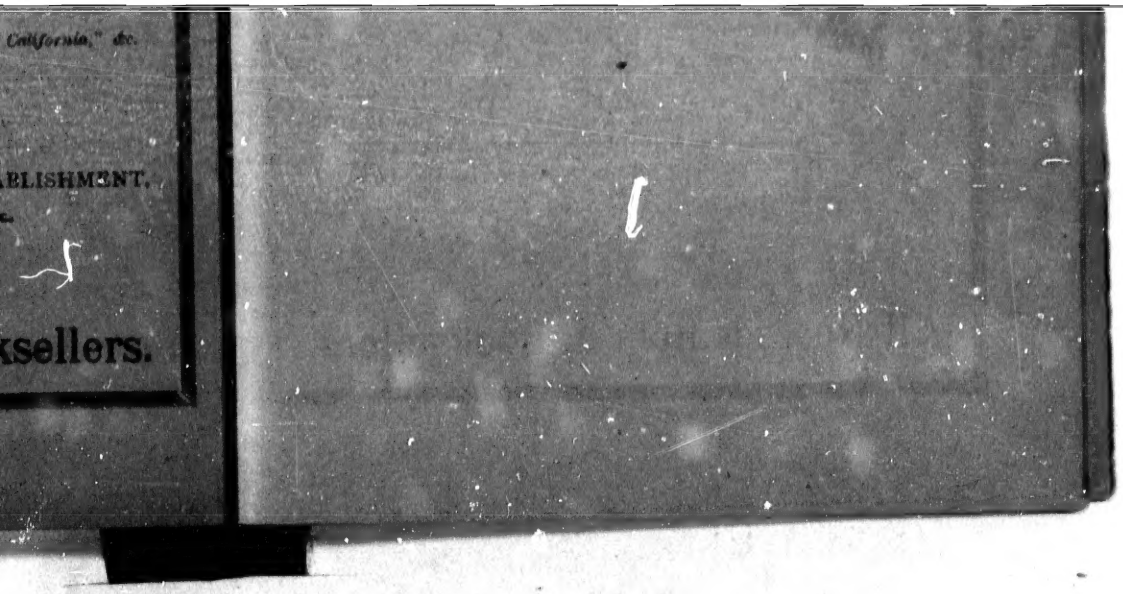
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